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UNCLAS RANGOON 000799

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: NLD VERIFIES POLITICAL PRISONER RELEASES

REF: A. RANGOON 21

[B](#). RANGOON 10

[C](#). 04 RANGOON 1571

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On July 6 the GOB implemented another prisoner release. National League for Democracy (NLD) sources say up to 410 prisoners were released from 11 prisons around the country. The NLD has reported 260 political prisoners among the released, though we can verify only 114 names. The political prisoners include NLD members, Buddhist monks, and some Karen National Union (KNU) members. NLD MP-elect, U Sein Hla Oo, is believed to be the most prominent prisoner released so far. An embassy employee interviewed two NLD political prisoners who were released this week and found one of them in poor condition. Embassy employees waited outside Insein Jail in Rangoon on July 7, but did not notice any unusual activity. Burma may be attempting to set itself up to become the next ASEAN chair. END SUMMARY.

[2](#)2. (SBU) On July 6, GOB authorities quietly released prisoners from at least 11 prisons all over Burma. According to NLD sources, 410 prisoners were released. Of these, 260 are reported to be political prisoners with nearly half of them being released from Insein Prison in Rangoon. However, the NLD has so far only been able to list the names of 114 political prisoners who are known to be released, so further verification is needed.

[3](#)3. (U) The released political prisoners include NLD members, Buddhist monks, and KNU members. The most prominent political prisoner released so far is U Sein Hla Oo, an NLD MP-elect from Insein Constituency. He was a key NLD strategist before he was arrested eleven years ago in 1994. Though initially sentenced to seven years imprisonment, his sentence was extended by four years in 2001.

[4](#)4. (SBU) An Embassy employee met two NLD political prisoners who were released on July 5 from Thayet Prison in central Burma. They had no clue they were to be released until they received orders that morning to pack their personal effects. One of them appeared to be very thin and frail. Another released prisoner reports that he did not have to agree with any "conditions" for release, but they were read out to him. He was informed that he was being released under the Penal Code 401, Section 2, dealing with "remission of sentences."

[5](#)5. (SBU) Poloff and an FSN waited around Insein Prison's main gate for an hour on the morning of July 7, but did not notice any unusual activity. There were no large crowds of relatives, but there were a few media stringers and an FSN from another embassy sitting in a tea stall across the street watching for developments.

[6](#)6. (SBU) COMMENT: Why now? It is not possible to know for sure, and the GOB has not made any official announcement about the prisoner releases. However, the fact that the ASEAN summit meeting takes place in Vientiane, Laos in two weeks is not lost on the NLD and other observers in Rangoon. With Burma slated to take over the ASEAN chair next year, the SPDC is under pressure to make a decision this month on whether to take its rotation or not. The release of prisoners, a high percentage of whom are political prisoners, may be a GOB attempt to "come clean" by demonstrating that it is moving "step-by-step" toward democracy and thereby enable its fellow ASEAN members "in good conscience" to let Burma assume its scheduled rotation as the next ASEAN chair. END COMMENT.
Martinez